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ABSTRACT

The document is a year-end report of a comprehensive student placement and followup program which is part of the career education project of Sarasota County, Florida. An overview of three basic components of the district-wide system is presented: (1) exit interview format--an in-depth counseling session with dropouts and potential early school leavers conducted by guidance counselors and occupational specialists to assess the reasons for withdrawal and to provide resources and strategies for assisting the student; (2) followup studies--surveys of graduates and early leavers from vocational programs and general curriculum and college preparatory programs to collect placement information as well as attitudes towards former school experiences, personnel, and methods of instruction; and (3) placement activities--including a pre-graduate data survey (coordinating the activities of graduate placement for those seniors seeking assistance), educational placement (assistance for postsecondary educational placement conducted by individual guidance departments in each high school), and employment placement (strategies and resources for placing students into full-time employment, in particular cooperation with the Sarasota County Chamber of Commerce and local mass media). Areas of concern and recommendations are discussed in a concluding section. (Author/EC)

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PLACEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP PROGRAM

1974-1975

SARASOTA COUNTY FLORIDA

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

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June 23, 1975

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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ABSTRACT

Placement and Follow-Up Studies 22 pages

This document is a year-end report of a comprehensive student placement and follow-up program of the School Board of Sarasota County, Sarasota, Florida.

The report gives an overview of three basic components of this district-wide system. (1) Exit Interview Format, an in-depth counseling session with potential and early school leavers. This section also gives some insight as to the revenues generated by the re-enrollment of school leavers into alternative educational programs; (2) Follow-Up Studies is a section giving a brief overview of two annual follow-up studies conducted by this school district, one for vocational graduates and one which includes all other recent graduates--general curriculum and college preparatory; (3) The third component is placement activities including a Pre-Graduate Data Survey (a senior's needs assessment), and educational placement and employment placement. The employment placement section includes information on a cooperative system of job referral and student public relations developed by the local Chamber of Commerce. Also included is a section on areas of concern and recommendations and a short summary conclusion.

This document should be of use to school districts of small to medium size, especially where limited staffing is available for comprehensive services.

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the 1974-1975 school year, student placement and follow-up services in Sarasota County progressed from the project stage to a district-wide comprehensive program. This past year is the first in which these services have been offered to all high school students, both vocational and non-vocational including Adult Evening High School students, in a coordinated, systematic manner. The model designed and implemented last year for non-vocational high school students has been successfully combined with existing strategies for vocational student placement and follow-up as a component of our Career Education Project.

The comprehensiveness of this program, while placing a heavy responsibility on the limited staff (one specialist and secretary) lends a broad base credibility to the philosophy that equal services should be available to all students regardless of their aspirations. This philosophy manifests itself in our school strategies for placement services by including educational assistance (both alternative high school avenues and post-secondary institutions) as well as employment assistance under the heading of comprehensive placement services. These are decentralized by guidance counselors and occupational specialists in each of the secondary schools in Sarasota County. The coordination and assistance given to these schools will be referred to later in this report. It is further felt that the most complete and functional system of

collecting follow-up data can be achieved by a centralized operation which is responsible for the retrieval of information from all former students. This is not only one way of insuring the same level of validity for all studies but also tends to produce more comparable data between different school populations.

The two major objectives of the Placement and Follow-up Program of the Sarasota County Career Education Project are:

1. To provide all students leaving our programs with assistance in securing placement that is compatible with their long-term career development interests and abilities.

2. To conduct systematic follow-up studies for the purpose of collecting data to objectively determine unmet needs and to analyze the effectiveness of the instructional program in completing its stated goals and objectives.

A short discussion of each of three components--Exit Interview Format, Follow-Up Studies, and Placement activities of this year's program will follow.

II. EXIT INTERVIEW FORMAT

The Exit Interview Format is designed primarily to be used as an assisting tool in a helping interview. It is used with two populations: 1. "No-Shows" are those students who are enrolled in Sarasota County schools at the end of the academic year and registered for Fall enrollment, and then do not show up at their respective high schools when the new school year begins. 2. School "leavers" are those students historically called dropouts because they were leaving the daytime high school program. Actually, the term "dropout" is a misnomer as many of the high school leavers (in Sarasota County the majority) enter and complete alternative educational programs.

The exit interview is an in-depth counseling session with a no-show, a school leaver, or a potential early leaver. It is conducted in our secondary schools by guidance counselors and occupational specialists whose primary concern is to assess the reasons for the withdrawal and to provide resources and strategies for assisting the student. This assistance could be in the form of a transfer into a different program within the same school, entrance into an alternative educational program, or employment placement. In many cases the end result is a combination of activities structured to coincide with that individual's interests and abilities.

The actual form used in these interviews is one supplied by this office and has two additional functions. This

instrument is used as a guide by the staff conducting the exit interview and therefore, lends some similarity to the task taking place. The design of this exit interview instrument also provides the interviewer the opportunity to gain an insight into the reasons for the students leaving and their perception of the curricula and programs in which the leaver (or potential leaver) was enrolled. It should be kept in mind that the primary function and philosophy of the exit interview is to assist the individual being counseled in a non-threatening, guidance oriented method and not to merely collect data.

The following figure will give an indication of the number of no-show and leaver contacts made by occupational specialists in our county. Many of the school leavers are contacted by guidance counselors who are responsible for performing many of the exit interviews in our high schools. Figure 1 is only a partial listing of all exit interviews.

Figure 1

Occupational Specialists
Placement and Follow-Up Activities

Schools	Follow-up of School Leavers	Follow-up of No-Shows	Exit Interview Conducted	Placement Alternative Programs
Senior High	308	349	120	81
Junior High	386	76	125	40
Total	694	425	245	121

The assistance by occupational specialists given to school no-shows and leavers is of primary concern to all educators interested in the welfare of individual students and concerned with seeing that individual needs are met by both flexible scheduling and/or alternative means t an educational end. A secondary point to be made is the addition of FTE funds generated by the enrollment of these individuals in Sarasota County programs.

The majority of these placements are into the New Directions program (FTE cost factor = 1.69) or Adult Evening High School (FTE cost factor = 1.60). Taking the more conservative figure of 1.60 and multiplying by per pupil FTE of $745, the district generates a weighted FTE of $1,192 for each student enrolled in one of these alternative educational programs. This figure ($1,192) multiplied by the 121 placements made by occupational specialists equals a total generated FTE of $144,232. After discounting this total figure, the direct program funds are equal to 56% of this figure or approximately $80,770. (The portion of each FTE going for indirect costs throughout the district is approximately 44% or about $63,460 of this total earned.)

These funds are earned by eight occupational specialists staffed at our junior and senior high schools (one at each) and is only one of the many responsibilities they have during the year. With alternative education becoming more essential, our specialists will hopefully, spend a proportionately greater amount of time and energy engaged in this activity.

From the exit interviews conducted with school leavers, primarily by high school guidance counselors, the following information is available. The statements, in order of preference, were listed most often as the reasons for withdrawal.

1. No longer interested in school.
2. Leaving for full-time employment.
3. Excessive absences.
4. Personal problems.

Of those students answering, "How could the school have encouraged you to remain in school," the following responses, in order of preference, were most repetitive:

1. Offer more involvement in Co-op programs.
2. Reduce class size.
3. Offer more vocational courses.

Listed below are the number of exit interviews with school leavers that were received by this office from secondary schools.

Sarasota High	83	Venice Junior High	13
Riverview High	65	Sarasota Junior High	15
Venice High	84	McIntosh Junior High	6
Booker High	2	Brookside Junior High	2
Adult Vo-Tech Center	6		

Total exit interviews received by this office were 276

I believe the area of assisting school leavers and no-shows is one of the most important functions we can direct our energies toward. Because this group leaves the regular high school does not mean they are a less important resource than those who choose to ride with the majority. The potential funds to be gained by assisting these individuals into alternative paths within our educational structure is not to be discounted. Indeed, other counties are showing that this aspect alone is more than paying the salary for staff to assist with existing student populations (see Alachua County Study).

III. FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

As previously mentioned, all follow-up studies on graduates and early leavers are a centralized program function. It is recommended that this function continue from a central office as to decentralize one component (vocational) from another (non-vocational) may cause a loss in the overall reporting effectiveness of one or the other. The concern here is that all survey populations receive the same efforts and professional attention, the same validity treatments, and hopefully, the same high rate of return that we have demonstrated in past studies. By centralizing the collection of follow-up data one also minimizes survey duplication, thereby reducing costs. In addition, more comparable data can be organized in a more comprehensive reporting format.

a. Vocational--All preparatory vocational program graduates and leavers with marketable skills were surveyed as a part of a state-wide system for contacting these students. This survey population numbered 850 former students from programs throughout Sarasota County. In addition, we then surveyed students' employers for a performance evaluation on these former vocational students, asking for feedback on "amount and quality" of work as well as areas dealing with more subjective judgments.

The data collected was tabulated into reports for Cooperative Training programs at each high school, Work Experience programs at Sarasota County Student Center,

for each individual preparatory offering at our County Vocational-Technical Center and finally a county-wide narrative report showing comparisons between the various vocational programs. The information generated through this system is basically of a placement nature analyzing where the graduates are presently, what they are doing, and to what degree it is related to their previous vocational training. The county-wide narrative report was distributed to all Directors of Career Education Projects in Florida by the State Department of Education as an exemplary vocational follow-up survey document.

b. General and College Preparatory--All 1200 graduates in the 1974 senior class from four district high schools plus the Adult Evening High School were surveyed during the year. This survey population consisted of all graduates not included as a part of the preparatory vocational survey. The information collected was produced into one county-wide narrative report with accompanying charts and figures. In addition, individual tabular summaries were prepared for each high school and were distributed to principals and county administrators. This data provided some comparisons between vocational and non-vocational as well as between various high schools in the system.

Besides placement information, this survey instrument asks our former students for a ranking of former school experiences, personnel, and methods of instruction. It also presents information regarding the former student's

suggestions for improvement through curriculum and program change.

Presently being developed is a second-stage performance evaluation on our former non-vocational students. This feedback should present data that is comparable with our preparatory vocational graduates. This survey will hopefully include both employer evaluations and a post-secondary educational evaluation of our former students academic performance.

IV. PLACEMENT ACTIVITIES

a. Pre-Graduate Data Survey--This office is responsible for coordinating the activities of graduate placement (in addition to early school leavers) for those seniors seeking such assistance. As mentioned in Part I, this assistance should be equal for a student regardless of their intention; be it higher education or employment placement.

Before resources can be identified and strategies applied, it is imperative to identify the population that needs to be served. Not all students need placement assistance from the school system and to try to provide it to the whole graduation class would drastically reduce effectiveness. For these reasons, the Placement and Follow-Up Program Specialist, with the assistance of a guidance counselor and/or occupational specialist, conducts a pre-graduation placement needs assessment. This in-class presentation takes place during March and April and in addition to measuring the overall need for such services, specifically identifies individual seniors who are requesting help in finding post-secondary placement or help in finding full-time employment. At the same time, this face to face student contact gives the program specialist an opportunity to explain the rationale for, and benefits of, the student follow-up survey that each graduate will receive in the future.

Figure 2 shows the results of this placement needs assessment by individual school and by county.

Figure 2

Pre-Graduate Data Survey
1975 Senior Class

	COUNTY-WIDE		RIVERVIEW HIGH SCHOOL		SARASOTA HIGH SCHOOL		VENICE HIGH SCHOOL	
Requesting Educational Placement Assistance	239	(21%)	101	(21%)	75	(23%)	63	(19%)
Requesting Employment Placement Assistance	191	(16%)	80	(16%)	37	(11%)	74	(27%)
Total Seniors Requesting Placement Assistance	430	(37%)	181	(37%)	112	(34%)	137	(41%)
Total Seniors Contacted	1154	(80%)	491	(87%)	328	(62%)	335	(97%)
Total 12th Grade Enrollment (March '75)	1437		563		527		347	

Note: Percentages requesting assistance are based on the number contacted.

Eighty percent of the senior class was contacted (1154 students) and of this number 430 requested some form of assistance. Of the 80% contacted, 16% (191) requested employment placement assistance, and 21% (239) requested some form of higher educational program assistance. If projected to the total school population this group requesting assistance before graduation would be proportionately greater.

b. Educational Placement--Assistance for post-secondary educational placement is conducted by individual guidance departments in each high school. Close cooperation and planning exists between the student, the parent, and the counselor assigned to the student. Guidance counselors assist those entering four-year and junior college programs with occupational specialists assisting many who are planning for a one or two year vocational or technical program after high school.

From follow-up data collected on the 1973-1974 graduation class we know that 82% of our former students believed that more assistance in finding educational placement would improve our high school program. The same survey information shows that about 60% of these graduates (not including vocational students) are actually continuing their education in some form of post-secondary matriculation. This points out the fact that possibly more students are asking for this type of information than realistically need or use it.

From the Pre-Graduate Data Survey conducted by this program, we know that approximately 21% of our high school seniors had requested some additional educational placement assistance as late as March or April of their senior year. What we are now trying to ascertain is how many of those requesting this service were actually contacted--if they were contacted, how was their status affected by the service offered. After identification takes place by this in-class pre-graduation presentation,

we need to know what action is taken by school guidance personnel.

One fact that is known; an extensive and very active program exists at each high school to make graduating seniors aware of guidance opportunities available for the purpose of post-secondary educational placement.

c. Employment Placement--Of the total number of graduates who were asked if they needed assistance, approximately 200 seniors replied in the affirmative this, only two months before graduation. The local economic conditions for the placing of these students into full-time employment were the most bleak since the early 1930's. The difference in economic conditions from one year previous (Spring 1974) was a staggering acceleration in the local unemployment rate from 4.5% to 13%. Because of these most unfavorable conditions it was evident that, not only was employment for high school graduates going to be extremely difficult, but that the strategies and resources used for the senior class of 1974 would need additional support and coordination.

The Job Data Bank, under a no-cost contractual arrangement with our local office of the Florida State Employment Service, has continued to be delivered to our high schools throughout this school year. From a job referral standpoint it has provided minimal benefits, with less than 20 students actually being sent to job interviews as a direct result of this system. That is not to say the daily listing of jobs provided by FSES

and the in-school hardware used by our guidance departments has not benefited Sarasota students. The data (job openings) provided to the school system by FSES is both an informational and educational tool giving indications of what types of employment openings are available for full-time employees, the skills needed for such job openings and, by the number of actual listings, an indication of the total economic employment condition on the central west coast of Florida. It is recommended, in view of the benefits versus cost ratio, that this system be continued. Being that the Job Data Bank is directly related to local economic conditions, as the employment conditions cycle upward, the value of having this system proportionately increases.

To support the above mentioned system it was thought that a direct solicitation for job referrals by the use of a bulk mailout to local employers might provide some assistance to our occupational specialists.

This strategy was conducted the previous year on a pilot basis and (keeping in perspective the difference in economic conditions) proved a useful resource. Because of the positive feedback received from the Sarasota County Chamber of Commerce regarding the Career Day program held in October, it was a natural follow-through to go back to the Chamber for assistance in student employment placement.

In a questionnaire sent to all Chamber participants of Career Day activities, many members indicated that

they would be, based on their positive experience with Sarasota high school seniors, willing to participate in a program designed to place students in jobs following graduation. As a result of this, Chamber of Commerce staff and management have provided a number of excellent supporting services for the employment placement of graduating seniors. The brief description that follows is in no way a reflection of the appreciation that I have for the most cooperative and valuable assistance given our program by the Sarasota County Chamber of Commerce.

On May 9, 1975, the Chamber's Sarasota Newsletter, was devoted to the advantages of hiring graduates of this year's senior class. The bold caption across the bottom of the front page read, "Sarasota Graduates Make Outstanding Employees. Let Us Know Your Openings." This front page was dedicated to student performance on the job and how the Chamber membership could help. On the following day a second mailout, again to all 2,000 of its membership, was sent reinforcing the Newsletter and containing a pre-paid job referral post card. This "Job Opening" card gave Chamber members the opportunity to list any present or future employment possibilities with occupational specialists in our area high schools. All printing, materials, and postage was supplied by the Chamber of Commerce, including the personnel to assemble, fold, and mail out this package. This strategy provided approximately 75 to 100 job listings which were identified

specifically for graduating Sarasota seniors--this in a time when unemployment was at a peak not seen since the depression of the 1930's.

This job placement assistance was followed by a public relations campaign entitled, "Student of the Day," and carried over a half dozen location radio stations. These short broadcasts were aired several times a day, at no cost to the School Board. Each day for approximately one month these radio spots highlighted one of our seniors in need of full-time employment after graduation. One station even ran an editorial on the significance of keeping our graduates here in Sarasota, as our most precious natural resource. Other realted activities are planned with our Chamber of Commerce including an inservice workshop for county staff entitled, "Adventures in Business," and directed toward economic awareness.

One additional employment activity was offered to our students, both graduates seeking permanent employment and in-school youth seeking summer jobs. The classified advertising department of the Herald-Tribune has provided free job advertisements to students seeking employment. Unfortunately this free service was not made available to students or known to the School Board until the last week of school and therefore left little time for us to "get the word out" to students. Hopefully, this activity will be coordinated with placement personnel next year and could prove to be, along with other

strategies, a valuable assistance to those students seeking employment.

Altogether, I believe we did a creditable job of providing assistance to graduating Sarasota high school students, at no cost to our clients, and only the cost of coordination to the School Board. The addition of community resources to assist our students has proven to not only be an excellent example of business-community-education cooperation, but has opened up the door for continued participation between these groups.

V. AREAS OF CONCERN AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Under present conditions, the greatest concern is the continuation of the services as they now exist. First, the reduction of Career Education catagorical funds by the State Legislature, then the further reduction of Sarasota County monies by a re-allocation formula which favors the larger counties, has cut the local Career Education project to a mere shadow. Couple this with increasing secondary student populations and a state-wide funding formula based on unequal assessments between counties, and continuation becomes a very real concern.

b. Task analysis of our school-based occupational specialists needs coordination and, in some cases, redefinition in line with original legislation and mandates. While the specialists' role will always remain flexible to individual school and guidance department needs, they should at the same time be the primary and predominate force in the educational organization for assisting school leavers and no-shows into alternative programs. They should, without question, be the one person in the school setting responsible for assisting graduating seniors into full-time employment placement. To do these two tasks they need both the initiative and the flexibility to leave the school setting for on-site visitations of individual students, community agencies and the local business/industry matrix.

c. The need for a Potential Early Leaver Identification Program modeled after the Alachua County effort is strongly recommended. In line with the large numbers of no-shows over the past two years and student leavers from our daytime high schools, it is of paramount necessity that we attempt to remediate the situation by first identifying potential leavers and then take ACTION to assist them before they exit.

This would take the full cooperation of occupational specialists and guidance counselors at the junior high level. In addition, building principals are most important in this program as sufficient supervision must take place for the needed remedial action to be effected within strictly adhered to timelines.

d. The need for more specific documentation of actual placements of student leavers and no-shows by occupational specialists is evident. Standardized forms for the recording of each placement by name of individual and program entered will provide the needed data to support continuation of these most important personnel. In addition, the same type standardized record of job placements is recommended for the coming school year.

e. There is a definite need for one additional occupational specialist to be assigned solely to the task of contacting and assisting no-shows and school leavers on a county-wide basis. This person would be responsible for assisting in the contact of no-shows during the early part of the school year and then assisting the

high schools with the off-campus contact of the many students who dropout of the school setting without ever going through a guidance function, i.e., exit interview. This person's salary would easily be paid for in generated FTE funds by the enrollment of students into alternative educational programs. It is estimated that one specialist could generate monies, far exceeding their salary, in actual and potentially lost FTE funds by operating this program.

VI. CONCLUSION

The placement and follow-up program in Sarasota County, operating as a component of our Career Education Project, has comprehensively provided services to all students both vocational and non-vocational regardless of their post-secondary aspirations.

The format of providing exit interviews to school leavers in a non-threatening guidance oriented function has been successfully implemented into our county secondary schools. Because of the active support of principals, guidance counselors, and occupational specialists, many leavers and no-shows are being assisted with enrollment into alternative educational programs. Even with these efforts more attention could be given to the placement of school leavers and no-shows and the identification of potential leavers. Through realistic strategies we could eliminate the common term "dropout."

Follow-up studies of our former students are providing decision-makers with input upon which improvement of curriculum and programs can be made. This component of the program has received both national and state-wide recognition and is considered to be exemplary in theory and practice.

Placement services have provided maximum resources at minimum costs to graduating seniors seeking full-time employment assistance. The utilization of community resources such as the Chamber of Commerce, local radio stations, and the Herald-Tribune, must be underscored for their assistance in this effort.

All objectives of student placement and follow-up as written into the Sarasota County School District 1974-1975 Comprehensive Educational Plan, have been met or exceeded. We look forward to improving upon our efforts in providing quality service and assistance to Sarasota County students.